

Message Text

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ACTION OES-07

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 ACDA-12 CIAE-00 INR-10 IO-13
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 EB-08 NRC-05 SOE-02 DODE-00
DOE-15 SS-15 SP-02 CEQ-01 PA-01 ICA-11 /123 W
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FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7900

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ENRG, TECH, CA
SUBJECT: SAFETY OF CANDU REACTORS

REF: OTTAWA 2965

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS DOE/HELFRICH AND NRC/LAFLEUR

1. DR. ALAN PRINCE, PRESIDENT OF ATOMIC ENERGY CONTROL BOARD OF CANADA (AECB) CALLED SCICOUNS ON 23 JUNE 1978 TO DISCUSS THE RASH OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES AND REPORTS ON RADIO AND TELEVISION ABOUT THE SAFETY OF CANDU REACTORS.
 2. PRINCE CHARACTERIZED THE REPORTS AND ARTICLES AS THE "SPRING OFFENSIVE OF THE ANTI-NUCLEARS" AND SAID THAT MUCH OF MATERIAL STEMMED FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE PORTER COMMISSION (SEE REFTEL).
 3. THE MOST POPULAR THEMES IN THE PUBLIC MEDIA REPORTS ARE: A) THAT THE AECB HAS BEEN CONCEALING INFORMATION FROM THE PORTER COMMISSION ABOUT THE SAFETY OF CANADIAN REACTORS; B) THAT INFORMATION HAS JUST COME OUT ABOUT THE INADEQUACY OF THE EMERGENCY CORE COOLING SYSTEMS;
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AND C) THAT IT HAS BEEN NECESSARY TO SHUT DOWN CERTAIN REACTORS BECAUSE OF INADEQUATE SAFETY PROTECTION.

4. DR. PRINCE SAID THAT ALL OF THESE REPORTS ARE INACCURATE AND ARE BASED ON STATEMENTS TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT FROM HEARINGS BEFORE THE PORTER COMMISSION OR FROM COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE AECB TO THE PORTER COMMISSION

WHICH WERE "LEAKED" TO THE PRESS. BECAUSE OF THE NUMBER OF RECENT CHARGES AND ALLEGATIONS, DR. PRINCE SAID THAT HE WAS GOING TO ISSUE A NEWS RELEASE TO CLARIFY THE SITUATION (HE HAS NOW DONE THIS, AND COPIES OF THE RELEASE ARE BEING POUCHED TO THE DEPARTMENT, DOE AND NRC).

5. CERTAIN KEY POINTS IN THE RELEASE, WHICH DR. PRINCE DISCUSSED WITH THE SCICOUNS, ARE AS FOLLOWS:

A) THE AECB IS CONFIDENT THAT PUBLIC SAFETY IS NOT BEING JEOPARDIZED BY THE OPERATION OF NUCLEAR POWER STATIONS IN CANADA.

B) IF SOUNDLY BASED SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE INDICATED THAT CONTINUED OPERATION OF ANY PLANT WOULD PRESENT AN IMMEDIATE AND UNACCEPTABLE HAZARD, THE BOARD (AECB) WOULD NOT HESITATE TO EXERCISE ITS AUTHORITY TO SUSPEND, AMEND OR REVOKE THE RELEVANT OPERATING LICENSE.

C) THE THEME ABOUT NUCLEAR AUTHORITIES WITHHOLDING INFORMATION FROM THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ELECTRIC POWER PLANNING FOR ONTARIO (THE "PORTER COMMISSION") STEMS FROM THE RELEASE OF A LETTER FROM CHAIRMAN PORTER TO RENE BRUNNELLE (SEE REFTEL). SINCE THAT TIME PORTER HAS WRITTEN A FURTHER LETTER TO BRUNNELLE WHICH STATES IN PART: "IT WAS UNFORTUNATE THAT MY LETTER TO YOU LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WAS TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT BY SUBSEQUENT PRESS STORIES AND THAT CONCLUSIONS WERE DRAWN WHICH WE DID NOT, IN FACT, INTEND TO IMPART. I WISH TO STRESS THAT THIS COMMISSION HAS NEVER SUGGESTED THAT ONTARIO'S NUCLEAR POWER STATIONS ARE UNSAFE, NOR THAT INFORMATION HAS BEEN 'WITHHELD' FROM US."

D) WITH RESPECT TO THE EMERGENCY CORE COOLING SYSTEM (ECCS), TWO AECB LICENSEES, ATOMIC ENERGY OF CANADA LIMITED (AECL) AND ONTARIO HYDRO BROUGHT THE ECCS SITUATION TO THE BOARD'S ATTENTION FOLLOWING A MORE SOPHISTICATED COMPUTER ANALYSIS CONDUCTED IN THE NORMAL COURSE OF THEIR RESEARCH PROGRAMS. IN JULY 1976 THE AECB REQUESTED OWNERS AND OPERATORS OF ALL POWER REACTORS IN CANADA TO USE THESE NEW TECHNIQUES TO REASSESS THE ECCS OF THEIR RESPECTIVE PLANTS. THE RESULTS OF THESE ANALYSES WERE REVIEWED BY THE AECB AND BY ITS REACTOR SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE, WHICH CONCLUDED THAT PUBLIC SAFETY WAS NOT JEOPARDIZED TO AN EXTENT JUSTIFYING THE SHUT-DOWN OF ANY PLANT. THE DOUGLAS POINT PLANT WAS SHUT DOWN FOR MAINTENANCE, AT THE TIME, AND THE REVIEW LED TO A DECISION THAT THE

POWER LEVEL, ON START-UP, SHOULD BE LIMITED TO 70 PERCENT OF FULL POWER, PENDING CERTAIN MODIFICATIONS TO ITS ECCS. THIS WAS DONE ON EXECUTIVE STAFF ORDER AND NO PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE.

E) THE QUESTION OF "NEW" INFORMATION BEING RECENTLY REVEALED IS UNTRUE, ACCORDING TO DR. PRINCE, AND ALL

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PERTINENT MATTERS RELATIVE TO REACTOR SAFETY (INCLUDING ECCS) WERE DISCUSSED IN QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSIONS BEFORE THE PORTER COMMISSION IN FEBRUARY 1978, OR IN THE NATURAL RESOURCES AND PUBLIC WORKS HEARINGS AT PARLIAMENT IN APRIL, 1977.

6. COMMENT: IT WAS APPARENT IN THE MEETING WITH DR. PRINCE THAT HE WAS INCENSED OVER THE ALLEGATIONS OF IMPROPRIETY, ON THE PART OF AECB, AND BY THE NEWS MEDIA. ALTHOUGH IT IS TRUE THAT THE SAFETY ISSUES AND ACTIONS OF THE BOARD HAVE BEEN BROUGHT OUT IN HEARINGS BEFORE THE PORTER COMMISSION AND PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES, THERE IS NO "FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT" IN CANADA AND THE PUBLIC IS NOT ROUTINELY INFORMED OF ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE ATOMIC ENERGY CONTROL BOARD.

THIS CREATES THE IMPRESSION THAT THERE IS A CONSCIOUS ATTEMPT TO "COVER UP" IMPORTANT NUCLEAR SAFETY ISSUES, AND CAUSES ANTI-NUCLEAR GROUPS TO TRY TO "DIG OUT" INFORMATION FROM VARIOUS SOURCES AND USE IT IN SCARE STORIES FOR THE PRESS.
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